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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 012168

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TAGS: PINR KDEM PGOV RS

SUBJECT: RUSSIA: LEFT-OF-CENTER PARTY MERGER FINALIZED

REF: ST PETERSBURG 690

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: 1.4(d)

**¶1.** (SBU) SUMMARY: On October 28, the new Spravedlivaya Rossiya ("A Just Russia") party was formally established in a merger of the Russian Party of Life, Rodina, and the Party of Pensioners. The leader of the new party is Federation Council Chairman and Russia Party of Life Chairman Sergey Mironov, who proclaimed the new party's support for President Putin at the founding conference. Spravedlivaya Rossiya has positioned itself to be the main rival of Kremlin-sponsored United Russia and will have its first test in the regional legislative elections in March. United Russia and the Communist Party both downplayed the importance of the new party, but both will likely lose voters to it. Observers believe that the creation of Spravedlivaya Rossiya strengthens Putin's hand, as he has broadened his party base to include both United Russia and the new party, without being tied down by either. END SUMMARY.

**¶2.** (U) The merger of the Russian Party of Life (RPL), Rodina, and Party of Pensioners (RPP) was finalized at the new Spravedlivaya Rossiya (SR) party conference in Moscow on October 28. In near-unanimous votes, the party members approved the party structure, leadership, and plans for the next year. In a show of Kremlin support for the merger, President Putin sent his congratulations to the party, saying, "Your decision to join forces testifies to the growth of the creative potential of Russian society."

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Leadership and Structure  
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**¶3.** (U) Leadership posts were distributed evenly among the merging parties. SR is led by Sergey Mironov, currently Federation Council Chairman and the leader of the RPL. Rodina leader Alexander Babakov will lead the party presidium, and RPP leader Igor Zotov will be Secretary of the party's central council.

**¶4.** (U) SR will have a congress as its supreme ruling body, a central council that will manage affairs between congresses, and a presidium that will attend to all immediate matters. The central council will consist of 165 deputies divided equally among the three parties. The presidium will contain 33 positions also divided equally among the three parties. The regional party leadership will be distributed based upon regional strength, with RPL and RPP each getting 21 regional leadership positions, Rodina getting 29, and 14 to be decided later.

**¶5.** (U) SR will be built upon Rodina's organizational base, which will make the official registration process simple. Rodina will officially change its name and then issue new party membership cards to all RPL, RPP, and Rodina members. Mironov predicted that SR will have 500,000 members. (Note:

Although Mironov stated that this would be Russia's largest party, United Russia claims membership of more than 1.2 million. End note.)

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Ideology  
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**¶6.** (U) At a press conference following the party convention, Mironov said, "we believe that there is a great deal of unfairness in our country. That is why we need to start with reforms of salaries and pensions." Mironov took aim at oligarchs "who we see every year on the list in Forbes, who have taken for themselves the wealth of Russia's natural resources." SR's goal would be to reduce the income gap between Russia's richest 10 percent and poorest 10 percent from the current ratio of 30 times to only two times.

**¶7.** (U) Mironov firmly set SR in opposition to both United Russia and the Communist Party (KPRF). In contrast to United Russia, "the party of power," his party would be the "party of the people." The KPRF ideology is "outdated." He predicted that soon members of other parties would defect to SR. "Let United Russia tremble," he said, when they see his party's strength grow. In response, United Russia presidium member Andrey Issayev predicted that United Russia would give the new party "a serious bashing" in the regional elections.

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Dissent  
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**¶8.** (U) The only dissenting voice at the conference was by Duma Deputy Yuriy Savelyev, the leader of the St. Petersburg

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chapter of Rodina. Savelyev was frozen out of a SR party leadership position in St. Petersburg in favor of the regional RPL leader, Oleg Nilov (reftel). Savelyev's ouster may have been prompted by his criticism of the parliamentary commission report on Beslan, which put him in conflict with Mironov. Savelyev stated that he would not join the new party because of ideological differences, namely that Rodina was an opposition party and that SR is not. He is threatening to take his St. Petersburg supporters with him, but even he was not optimistic that many of them would follow his lead.

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Future outlook  
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**¶9.** (U) The party will immediately commence work on its bylaws, which will incorporate proposals from the parties and from the regions, and will be finalized at the next party congress in February. Babakov said that the party's intention is to secure a majority in the Russian Duma in the December 2007 elections. Mironov dismissed speculation that he might run for President in 2008, and emphasized that the party was focused on legislative elections in 2007.

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Reaction from United Russia and the KPRF  
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**¶10.** (C) Leonid Goryainov, the chain-smoking director of United Russia's Central Executive Committee information service, told us on October 31 that the creation of SR was good for the country and for United Russia. "We are against any monopoly on power, and welcome the competition. Now the country can stop having this pointless debate about 'Is Russia a democracy?' Of course we are a democracy. Now let us focus on matters of substance, like income tax rates." Goryainov predicted that United Russia would likely lose ground to SR, which he said would win 15-20 percent of the seats in the 2007 Duma elections.

¶11. (C) Per Goryainov, "it was indecent for Mironov to talk so much about the need for an opposition party when he had never voted against any major United Russia proposal." The defection of some United Russia members to SR would only strengthen United Russia. "This will free the party of opportunists who only want power and who are not committed to United Russia's program. Let those who disagree leave, and we can openly debate our differences, party to party."

¶12. (C) Putin loyalists ascribe different motives behind the Presidential Administration's tinkering with political parties. Goryainov described SR as a means to end for Putin's legacy: A stable multi-party democracy for Russia. "Those who suggest only raw power politics in these affairs misconstrue the President's motives." Putin was using his training as a lawyer and his knowledge of stable, multi-party systems to create a similar lasting system for Russia. Vitaliy Tretyakov, Editor of Moscow News and an adviser to United Russia, provided a more candid assessment, noting that the party system is "a mechanism of the Presidential Administration, a pretense, a project."

¶13. (U) At an October 26 press conference, KPRF leader Gennadiy Zyuganov said that SR, like United Russia, was an artificial creation that posed no real threat to the KPRF. "They are again trying to take votes from us, but they will fail, just like they failed with Rodina." KPRF Duma Deputy Ivan Melnikov contended that Mironov, far from being an opposition figure, "has in fact supported United Russia on every vote!" Melnikov sees the creation of SR as a validation of the KPRF platform. "The country has failed to stand on only one right leg. This new party is now using our leftist rhetoric, as is United Russia."

¶14. (C) The Center for Political Technologies' Sergey Mikheyev agreed that SR would likely win about 20 percent of the seats in the 2007 Duma elections. Their main task would be in the regions where they need to work on combining fractious elements into a united party. He predicted that this new party would pull some supporters from the KPRF, but that the real loser would be United Russia, which is very worried about how much it would lose.

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What's in a name?  
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¶15. (U) The new party's official name is transliterated "Spravedlivaya Rossiya: Rodina, Pensiyoniry Zhizn" and can be translated as "A Just Russia: Motherland, Pensioners, Life." The party's flag is similar to the Russian tri-color (and

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similar to United Russia's banner), except the red band at the bottom is much broader, with "Spravedlivaya Rossiya" written in gold letters.

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Comment  
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¶16. (C) The SR party has now been firmly established, with the Kremlin's support and blessing, as a left-of-center counterweight to United Russia and a forum for intra-Kremlin rivalries to be fought out. It enables the Kremlin to potentially outflank incipient opposition movements that have brought down neighboring governments, by allowing Putin to react to swings in the national mood without being tied down by a party base or ideology.

¶17. (C) The news is not good for United Russia, practitioners of a "sovereign democracy" under one ruling party, who had until now enjoyed a monopoly on both governmental power and on Putin's image. Many voters, who supported United Russia because of its affiliation with Putin, may now find an

alternative in SR. The first cracks in the dam appeared last week in Samara, when for the first time an RPL candidate defeated a United Russia candidate for mayor; and on October 27, when three United Russia Duma deputies from Saratov defected to the new Kremlin party.

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